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BETTER-ENGLISH CLUBS

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The occasion of this paper is the suggestion made last February at the meeting of our National Council that we have Junior English Councils in imitation of the Junior Red Cross and similar organizations. A request was made of me at the time that I formulate plans for this purpose to be considered and acted upon by the National Council of Teachers of English.

In presenting the following I hope that none will consider me as leaning too far toward the characteristic American proneness toward clubs as expressed recently by a writer in the *English Journal* to the effect that wherever two or three Americans are gathered together, forthwith an organization is effected with one as president, one as vice-president, etc.; or as implied in the story that when an Englishman was told by an American that in almost every community of the latter's country there was a Browning club, the former replied, "We try to understand Browning without clubs"; nor would I have my readers consider me as advocating the organizing of English clubs except under favorable conditions and by teachers who are suited by temperament and who have at their command sufficient leisure for such work.

The question of forming English clubs leads us back to that of the socialized recitation. One of the liveliest discussions of the National Council concerned this subject about two years ago. After varying opinions were expressed, one advocating the teacher's being wholly in the background, and another the contrary, upon the chairman's requesting all who had used some kind of socialized recitation within the past year to rise, most of those present stood. In the minds of several of us this question and that of its corollary, the project, was settled then once for all.

As I have studied the organizations, the Boy Scouts, which has a world-wide membership of 2,000,000, the Girl Scouts, which

numbers in America 60,000, the Camp Fire Girls, which numbers in America 100,000, the Woodcraft League of America, the Federated Boys' and Girls' Clubs of our government, which number in membership 529,723, and others, all of these organizations comparatively young, and when I see what results they have produced, it is amazing to me that we teachers of English are only beginning to utilize this means of instruction and guidance. Certainly such a method is in keeping with what we are striving for in modern education—definite attainments, social development, leadership, creativeness.

The advantages accruing from club work, to state them more fully, are evidently the following: (1) It appeals to the imagination. Is not the fact that the Chicago riot of last summer involved largely boys and young men between the ages of twelve and twenty indicative of unsatisfied craving for adventure? Do we teachers not come daily upon such instances as these: several of our ninth-grade boys of Northwestern High School told me last year that they were interested in reading the newspaper only for its accounts of robberies and thefts; one eighth-grade boy wrote in a letter, "If I had my way, I'd blow up every schoolhouse in the country and go away to work on a boat"? (2) It uses the creative faculty more extensively than other means do. (3) It utilizes the play spirit. (4) It develops self-government and leadership. (5) It secures comradeship among pupils, and between pupil and teachers. (6) It satisfies a boy's or a girl's desire to do things. Ex-President Charles Eliot has said that education is a process of observing, comparing, doing. It is often possible, as several club leaders have observed, to reach the child who is not touched by books through an opportunity to do—to do such things, for instance, as filing papers, arranging pictures or posters, keeping the class library in order, arranging exhibits, planning programs, even helping with the class records. This winter I found two boys one afternoon disputing as to who should enjoy the privilege of being librarian while the other attended the most exciting football game of the season. Another day I came upon a boy, not particularly interested in books, who insisted upon remaining alone in the classroom until six o'clock to rearrange the speech posters. (7) It

reproduces life in miniature. Is it not agreed generally today that English instruction has a fertile soil only when life-situations are reproduced within the classroom?

For immediate suggestion we have in many English departments well-developed clubs. In some instances, the club includes the whole department, as in Cass Technical High School, Detroit. Mr. Certain's plan is as follows: The Council is composed of units, the Freshman class, etc., each unit having representatives in the executive body. Each month the representatives visit the classes of their respective units and choose the projects (the classes have monthly projects) suitable for the monthly programs of the units. During the week of meetings, there are interclass programs representing the various projects. Once or twice a year the whole department assembles for a general program. At the meetings the audience, by previous agreement, comment in writing upon desirable attainments on the part of those speaking, or reading, or acting.

A club may be limited to a class, as in the case of a notable club in Detroit several years ago, which directed its interests toward debating. The leader of that club tells me that the boys of that class, eighth grade, were so interested that they retained the club afterward with the result that the members became some of the leading men of Detroit. At Northwestern High School the senate is the Senior class in English, really a debating club during the second semester.

Several speech clubs have arisen as a result of the Speech Movement interest. The most firmly established club of this kind is the Speech Improvement League of Eastern District High School, Brooklyn, New York, under the direction of Miss Rachel Dittridge. There are four divisions, called speaking clubs, with a committee representative of all, who have charge of general activities, such as the semiannual observance of Speech Week. The Correct English Club of the High School, Portland, Maine, organized last February under the direction of Miss Lilla A. Stetson, consists of active and associate members and meets during the class period twice a month. It has the following committees: research, exposition, fiction, rhymes, art, dramatics.

The classes of Miss Maude F. English, Junior High School, Washington, D.C., have organized separate Better-English Clubs. In the beginning, through class discussions there were evolved written statements in each class as to name of the club, aims, rules, individual needs in speech of classmen. "Our ultimate aim," writes Miss English, "is to have each class write and act an original play, the best to be repeated next fall to start the new drive."

For the sake of co-ordination of activities and the general promotion of English clubs, we should have ultimately a system similar to that of the Boy Scouts and other such organizations. In order to secure the best results, we may use many suggestions from the common experiences of these bodies.

Age.—The most active members are the adolescents, 12-15, 15-18 years of age. In answer to demands, however, in several instances, there are groups above 18 and below 12, neither being as closely supervised as the ages mentioned above. Certainly we would not lose the advantage which many educators have prized as gained through Speech Week, an intermingling of the teachers in the several school units and therefore better mutual understanding. Nor would we exclude the elementary unit, which represents about 75 per cent of our public-school enrollment.

Aims.—In every case there is a general statement of aim and there are certain levels of attainment whereby one obtains his rank. The Boy Scout, for instance, promises to do his duty to God and his country and to obey the scout law, to help other people at all times, to keep himself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight. He advances by certain attainments from the rank of tenderfoot to second class, and thence to first class. Moreover, for advanced members in almost all of these organizations, recognition is made of the differing lines of interest by the awarding of merit badges for attainment in one or more of about forty pursuits. Ernest Thompson Seton in the manual of the Woodcraft League of America presents very definite tests in nature-study, angling, bird-lore, etc., many of them formulated by such persons as Burroughs, van Dyke, Frank Chapman. We of the National Council have the means for such formulation of aims in the reports of the Committee of Thirty and the Com-

mittee on Economy of Time. We have an incidental suggestion from the Junior Civic and Industrial League under the supervision of the Commercial Club of Lincoln, Nebraska. For the boys and girls of that club, the school and employers have planned an efficiency test which includes the following requirements in English: (1) ability to write a good business letter of one ordinary page in legible hand without error in spelling; (2) ability to express himself in courteous, yet concise and business-like terms to his employer and business associates.

Organization.—The general plan seems to be that of having a captain or guardian subject directly to the national headquarters, the group in each case comprising twenty or thirty members. This group is subdivided into two or three groups with representative leaders who serve each a month at a time. A charter for the year is issued to each general group.

Ceremonials, badges, emblems, etc.—All these materials make a tremendous appeal to the youth of our country. Someone has remarked that the name "scout" has in itself drawn to the organization many a boy. The observances of Speech Week, with their spies, detectives, mythological and legendary characters and other make-believes, and the popular projects such as the International Travel Club, will furnish much as a basis for our building in this respect.

Finances.—Most of the organizations are supported by the fees of the units of twenty or thirty (from \$3 to \$5 per year) and the emblems, etc.

In sum, I would suggest for consideration and action by the Council the following plan: (1) that a department for English Clubs be opened in the *English Journal* as soon as practicable, for exchanging experiences of those who have organized and are organizing clubs; (2) that upon the experience of the teachers interested thus, after a few months, or a year or two, the Council through a committee formulate a general system incorporating whatever suggestions given above and otherwise might seem advisable.

Whether we are modest or ambitious in this our new venture, we shall in a measure at least be meeting the interests of youth.

Ripe for exploits and mighty enterprises.

A FEW REFERENCES

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H. D. Sedgwick, "Our Schoolgirls," *Atlantic Monthly*, June, 1917, p. 801.

R. R. Crawford, "Training the Young in Civic Duties," *American City*, XVI (1917), 359.

Organizations

American Red Cross, Washington, D.C.

Boy Scouts of America, 200 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Camp Fire Girls, 31 E. 17 Street, New York City.

Girl Scouts, 189 Lexington Avenue, New York City.

Federated Boys' and Girls' Clubs, United States Department of Agriculture, Extension Department, Washington, D.C.

Bunker Hill Boys' Club, Charleston, Boston.

Woodcraft League of America, 13 W. 29 Street, New York City.

The Boys' Club Federation, 110 W. 40 Street, New York City.

Boys' Brotherhood Republic, 839 Ashland Boulevard, Chicago.

National Association of Audubon Societies, 1974 Broadway, New York.

Chemcraft Chemist Club, Hagerstown, Maryland.